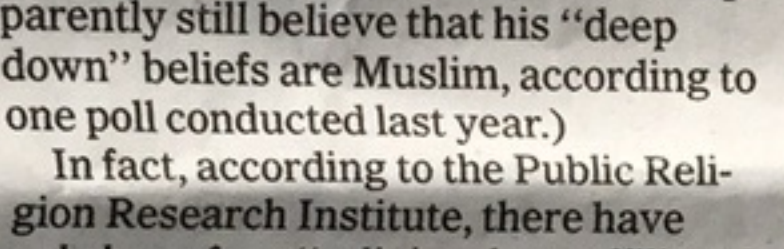
the inner within the outer, the intimate secreting the universal. I liked to be the outsider looking in.

pense of the present, memory becomes a blind alley. Those keys to long-lost Palestinian olive groves are now open-

gent national narratives, cency, meet our daily obligation look forward.

Unaffiliated and underrepresented



Charles M. Blow

President Obama is a Christian (despite the fact that most Republicans apparently still believe that his "deep down" beliefs are Muslim, according to one poll conducted last year.)

In fact, according to the Public Religion Research Institute, there have only been four "religiously unaffiliated heads of state in American history," the last being Rutherford B. Hayes, who left office in 1881. This, however, does not mean that they did not believe in God.

Perhaps the most famous unaffiliated president was Abraham Lincoln, who wrote in 1846:

"That I am not a member of any Christian Church, is true; but I have never denied the truth of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular."

Now it is almost unconscionable to think of a president who didn't believe in God. In fact, a poll last year by the Pew Research Center found that not believing in God was the most negative trait a presidential candidate could have among a variety of options, even more negative than having an extramarital affair.

Furthermore, in the House and Senate at the beginning of this session of Congress, 92 percent of members were Christian, 5 percent were Jewish, 0.4 percent each were Buddhist and Muslim and just 0.2 percent were unaffiliated. For those doing the math, that leaves only one member unaffiliated: Representative Kyrsten Sinema, a Democrat from Arizona.

But how long can this overrepresentation of Christianity and underrepresentation of the unaffiliated last in government? According to a Pew report released last week, "The Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing." In fact, the percentage of adults who "describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly eight percentage points in just seven years," from 78.4 percent in 2007 to 70.6 percent in 2014.

But the report also found, "Over the same period, the percentage of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated — describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular' — has jumped more than six points, from 16.1 percent to 22.8 percent." Much of the change comes from younger people. According to the report, "About a third of older millennials (adults currently in their late 20s and early 30s) now say they have no religion, up nine percentage points among this cohort since 2007, when the same group was between ages 18 and 26."

This begs the question: How much longer will America be thought of as a strictly Christian nation (if it ever really was one) with an overwhelming Christian government?

In March, Kevin M. Kruse, a professor of history at Princeton University, argued in The New York Times that "the founding fathers didn't create the ceremonies and slogans that come to mind when we consider whether this is a Christian nation. Our grandfathers did." This, according to Kruse, began with anti-New Deal business leaders in the 1930s who linked capitalism to Christianity as a public relations move.

From there, the idea of America as a Christian nation grew and expanded so that, according to Kruse: "Public Policy Polling reported that 57 percent of Republicans favored officially maki United States a Christian nation. 2007, a survey by the First Amen Center showed that 55 percent of icans believed it already was one.

But what comes of this idea of a Christian nation as the percentag Christians drops and the percenta the unaffiliated rises?

We already see a rising sentime America that Christianity is under tack and losing the culture wars. S even try to link Christian persecut abroad to the plight of Christians i United States.

It is true that "Christians in the Middle East and Africa are being slaughtered, tortured, raped, kidnapped, beheaded and forced to flee birthplace of Christianity," as Kristen Powers wrote two years ago in The Daily Beast. And t recent rise of the Islamic State has ma spectacle of the killings of Christian

How long can the overrepresentation of Christianity and underrepresentation of the unaffiliated last in the U.S. government?

But, it seems to severely cheapen th plight of those Christians whose lives were disrupted, destroyed or even taken by comparing them to American Christians who are simply seeing their reach and influence wane. The issue in America is less that Christians are persecuted as much as peevish.

If the unaffiliated are to make their presence felt in terms of more representation, it will most likely come on the Democratic side. As PRRI points out, in 1980 unaffiliated support for Jimmy Carter over Ronald Reagan was by a margin in the single digits by percentage; in 2012, they supported Barack Obama over Mitt Romney by 51 percentage points.

That time will come, I believe. But for now, unaffiliated is an identity as yet unaware of its power.